

One-generation Mennonites

This issue of *Report* gives voice to five women from various religious and cultural backgrounds who have emigrated to the Mennonite church. Each has a unique story to tell. All have had negative experiences, yet four report that they have successfully crossed over. By contrast, I have not felt fully integrated into the Mennonite community. I hope my voice will reflect women who are still struggling to make a place for themselves.

In the Franconia Conference of the Mennonite church I am labeled a "non-ethnic" Mennonite, because I am not from Swiss/German Mennonite descent. I feel my identity should reflect *who I am* rather than *what I am not*, but if I claim an ethnicity of Austrian-English-German, I have a mushy identity which I have only tracked a few generations. It would be more descriptive to say I am a chocolate-loving Mennonite or a movie-freak Mennonite.

Actually, it is curious to me that Mennonite identity is so tied to ethnicity. So-called ethnic Mennonites have even allowed their heritage to define them as individuals. My understanding of God's creative work is tied into my uniqueness, which does not ignore my need for communal life, nor reduce the magnetism that draws us together for worship and discernment of God. So, while my identity is informed by human history, it is not confined to that shape. Rather, I sense the dynamic of the Spirit in my life significantly shaping who I am *today*.

When I joined the Mennonite church, my husband and I were seeking a closer community

than we had experienced in other churches. Community is important to John and me, because it reaches for integration in the body of Christ. Yet the cultural identity of Mennonites we live among has made becoming a "one-generation Mennonite" a complex problem. Right from the beginning, I felt like I was trying to add my family to multi-generational Mennonites with different denominators.

An early symbol of this problem follows: When I joined the Mennonite church in February 1981, the pastor encouraged me to be baptized. I felt that I was being treated like a new convert. Since I was raised by a Christian family and joined the Christian church as a covenanted member at age 14, I saw re-baptism as invalidating my first decision and my years of commitment to Christ. Besides that, I had studied Anabaptist belief and history in a membership class, which had prepared me for joining the Mennonite church.

I told the pastor, a one-generation Mennonite himself, how I was struggling with the request to be re-baptized. He assured me that accepting "believer's" baptism was a public affirmation of my adult decision made before in another community. Since I really wanted to be fully accepted by that church, I did it. Looking back, I see that incident as the first attempt at re-shaping my identity, changing my denominator in order to be added into the Mennonite community.

In a short time I discovered that being fully Mennonite in the heartland of Franconia Conference takes more than believer's baptism. It has a lot to do with genes. Even a num-



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ber of women who have married into the community have told me that they have feelings of exclusion. There is a moat that surrounds Mennonite families who were transplanted to this area two centuries ago. I don't think the drawbridge is always intentionally pulled up, but many generations of enclosure has established a comfortable same-ness that is difficult to let down.

The Swiss-German Mennonite castle is a closed system in this community, from which I've experienced exclusion in a variety of ways:

1. Communication travels through a network referred to, with smiles, as "the grapevine." One-generation Mennonites are seldom grafted to that vine.
2. When trouble comes to relationships in the Mennonite community, family comes first, people who are lifetime friends come next, and newcomers are last, if included.
3. Prominent people in the congregation confer privately within an invisible structure of authority, where church decisions are often made. (In our congregation I have heard them referred to as "the secret seven.") Congregational or committee meetings simply put "the right spin" on those decisions. Even when discernment is called for in the gathered congregation, the words of persons with family history and community position generally hold sway. (See *Gospel Herald*, Nov. 22, 1994, "Readers Say," Roy Bender.)
4. Church "family" activities take on a different meaning in the Mennonite churches I have attended. For the most part, biological families tend to group themselves together at fellowship meals, activities and even at Sunday worship. I have learned to be careful not to sit on the wrong bench.

While often I have found the history of multi-generational Mennonites daunting, there are a number of ways in which my 14 years in the Mennonite faith community have been fulfilling. I have been nurtured in my faith and occasionally challenged to re-think how I have done biblical interpretation. I have frequently been accepted even when my views differed from the group (mostly in small groups). I have been given positions of leadership that allowed me to dis-

cover some of my gifts. I have the warm memory of an overwhelming response when I was recuperating from the trauma of a broken back. (My first Sunday worship after the accident the congregation even broke into spontaneous applause to welcome me.) Most importantly, I have found some exceptional Mennonite friends who have enriched my life immeasurably. For all these experiences I am grateful and humbled.

Still, when asked to express the differences for me as a one-generation Mennonite in the heart of Franconia Conference, I need to say that too often I have been walled out of the inner sanctum reserved for multi-generational Mennonites. Frankly, during the writing of this article my husband and I are re-evaluating our place in our congregation and in the Mennonite church.

We have both recently felt "shouldered out" of our staff positions in the congregation. I know this sort of reshuffling goes on in churches all the time, but had ours been one of the multi-generational families, we would have gotten the respect of direct communication. (In a closed system one cannot afford to make enemies.) Instead I spent months trying to figure out what was happening and finally concluded that I was expected to resign. Even a year later when I was invited to talk about it, I heard no acknowledgement of improper process, only regret that I felt so hurt. Here again, it was inferred that I am the one who needs to change.

In Libby Caes' article she says she didn't want to become one of those angry women she had seen in the church. I don't think any of us start out wanting to be angry, but I have walked straight into a dilemma. If I stay, and continue to be upset about the walls keeping one-generation Mennonites out of "the loop," as well as women out of pastoral leadership, I am labeled an angry woman. If I leave the church altogether, I am not only angry, but I am a lapsed Mennonite.

What I desire is a community that values my changing shape, one that is willing to fully integrate me as I am. Can I find that in the Mennonite church? Can I find it anywhere in the church?

—by Linda Holland, compiler

Linda Holland lives in Harleysville, Pa. She recently graduated from Eastern Baptist Seminary with an M.A. in biblical studies. She plans to explore holistic spirituality at Chestnut Hill College in the spring. Linda serves on the steering committee for Mennonite Women in Leadership (Franconia and Eastern District Conferences).

"This integration did not come about without difficulty. For instance, while studying theology the Mennonite work ethic challenged me."

by Sonia Blanchette

A Mennonite Brethren Quebecer

I was 19 years old before I even heard the word Mennonite. I had no idea that a church with such values existed in St. Eustache, Quebec, the town where I was born. It is important to know something about the history of Quebec to understand the influences that shaped my experience of church there.

In its history, Quebec has been caught between the political and economic power of the French and the English. In the 18th century, to be French in Quebec meant to be a Roman Catholic. French Protestantism was condemned by the Roman Catholic church, which taught that if you were a Protestant, you were a pagan. There was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic church. No wonder that the English and French people did not speak to each other! How could they do business or other acts of living together when they each believed that the other was condemned to Hell? My French heritage came from these old roots.

Before 1960 the minority English population of Quebec ran almost all of the economic activity. After 1960 a quiet revolution occurred—French Canadians were given access to higher education and they began to start small business enterprises. Slowly the French moved away from the power that the Roman Catholic Church had held in their lives. The shift opened the way for religious life to spread into different groups. It was a social movement that brought about a more integrated society. The result for French people was that they were given a variety of political, economic and religious options.

One change that a secular viewpoint brought about was the option to have smaller families. Formerly large families (13 children) were common, but as French society turned from Roman Catholic church teachings, they became free to keep their families small. This radical reaction to the Roman Catholic church was not a sign of the people's religious indifference; rather it was the people calling for change in the structure of their society.

In the years between the 1960s and 1980s, the way had become clear for me to explore the Mennonite Brethren Church in St. Eustache. In October 1982 I committed my



life to Christ. I was then trying to find a church where I could grow spiritually. The Mennonite Brethren Church was so new to me that I felt I needed to investigate it fully in order to make a decision to join this denomination. I wanted to know who these people were, and what their background was. I wondered why they had started a church with such a different viewpoint in my town. My curiosity about Mennonite Brethren beliefs, and a vision I had that I should change my major from politics to Bible, led me to make a decision to study in Winnipeg, the most Mennonite city I could find.

In the meantime I became a good friend of a man who had experienced a similar change of focus—from arts to Bible. We eventually married and moved to Winnipeg in December 1984. It was the day after Christmas and -40 degrees when we traveled west in our little Chevy.

In Winnipeg I was able to get some distance from my own religious-cultural background, which helped me evaluate its validity. It took me two years to speak English comfortably, so that I did not feel ashamed of my accent. By studying theology in a Mennonite context, I was able to consider the differences and to decide what I believed. My husband and I both studied at the Bible college for two and a half years. When we graduated, we carried our first baby in our arms.

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We prayed for direction—should we go on to seminary or not? Doors opened for us and we moved to Fresno, Calif., to attend Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. There I became immersed with international students. Within a montage of cultural backgrounds, I could better understand who I was as a Mennonite Quebecer, while still appreciating my own roots. After three years my husband and I graduated. This time each of us was holding a child. By then I was on my way to a new ministry that was calling me back to Quebec, a ministry that allowed me to be a Mennonite Brethren Quebecer, proud of my heritage!

This integration did not come about without difficulty. For instance, while studying theology the Mennonite work ethic challenged me. I found I had to put aside some deeply ingrained French cultural traits. My family had a celebrative spirit that was expressed in parties. Entertainment, fun and sports had always been important to me as a child, but during the first years of integration into the Mennonite community, these things could not be a priority.

Now there are three children in our family, the third born in Quebec. Currently we have our own business in graphic design and live in Boisbriand, next to St. Eustache. I find I must hold together my relationships with my siblings and neighbors who do not go to church and my church friends. I experience a tension between these groups on a daily basis.

While on one hand, this situation allows some balance in my faith life, on the other hand it divides my social life into three sections—religion, family and friends. I feel good that our children are getting to know their relatives and learning the art of celebration as we attend parties with my family year round.

As a French Mennonite believer, I bring with me a nostalgia for the beauty of Roman Catholic church structures. Those impressive monuments and works of art encompass the faith of previous generations and appeal to the esthetics of today's worshippers. I find this sense of the aesthetic almost absent in the Mennonite tradition, and I miss it.

In the French Mennonite church we have incorporated some French culture into worship. For example, singing is spontaneous. There is no music to read. Each song flows to the next without separation. In our worship we follow the beat together, clapping and moving.

Another integration of French culture into our Mennonite Brethren church is the kiss on both cheeks. For us, this kiss

is like hand shaking. The kiss on both cheeks expresses our emotions, an essential aspect of being French. For us to kill that tradition in order to be good Mennonites, would be to not taste life to its fullest. We must not lose sight of who we are.

My own relationship with God has been enhanced through the Mennonite community. One way that relationship is expressed is in the Mennonite Brethren priority of evangelism. In our small groups we pray for our neighbors and friends who do not know the Lord, as well as for others to keep faithful in their walks with the Lord. Whenever I can share with others the privilege of my faith, I become renewed in the Spirit and can serve more effectively.

The place where evangelism touches me most deeply is in my desire to see my family (three sisters, two brothers, mom, nieces and nephews, etc.) get to know the Lord personally. Because the gift of faith is so precious to me, I pray for the Spirit of God to do this work for them.

Regarding our church's social involvement, I have observed young Christians in our Mennonite churches become more creative. Some members of the St. Laurent Church in Montreal are involved with Direction Chrétienne and have worked on terrific projects like the "Centre Accroche." This is a center where young people who do not fit into the nearby public school can come and talk with counselors who are there to be their friends and guides. This project is grounded in the love of Jesus.

It is my conviction that when marginal students' lives are changed to walk with God, the Mennonite church is enhanced and Quebec families are influenced. This type of ministry removes the feeling of helplessness many of our youth are experiencing, a helplessness that results in the highest rate of Canadian suicide being here in Quebec. Through these changed lives and families, a new vision of Quebec society emerges, and it is a vision formed through hope, a hope that I hold within me.

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"I decided not to allow the traditional role of a pastor's wife to define me. I wanted to move into my role by faithful listening to the Spirit of Christ within me and among the gathered community."

by Wendy J. Miller

Inward and outward journey in the Mennonite church

I had my first encounter with a woman from within the Mennonite church while I was a college-age student in Paris, France. Dorothy was a professor in the Bible institute where I was studying. She had grown up Mennonite and as an adult had married a Cuban with whom she served in missionary work. I remember Dorothy presenting a Christian education lecture in my class. She used an illustration about how she had experimented by wearing brighter clothes in a children's class she was teaching, and noting how her students had enjoyed the colors in her dress.

Dorothy's choice of brighter clothes for her young students was not what attracted me to her. Rather, she possessed a certain quietness and poise that I had rarely seen in other women. I was a young woman from England forming my own identity as a believer and as a woman who had been called into ministry. Europe was changing at a rapid pace in the late 1950s, and in both society and ministry Dorothy modeled a woman who spoke from deep within herself. She had a calm power that was never coercive.

I watched Dorothy in her role as mother—she welcomed her children with love and with a recognition of the presence of Jesus within them. It was her presence with her children that would shape my own experience of motherhood. In addition she was a professor and counselor who gave wise spiritual guidance. I was drawn to Dorothy's maturity in all her roles, but at the time I did not connect any of that to her upbringing in the Mennonite church.

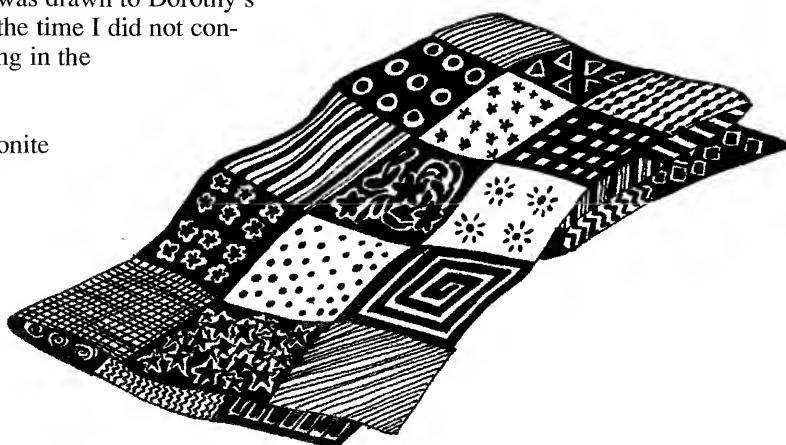
I didn't begin to attend a Mennonite church until I was living in the United States during the mid-1970s. By that time I was married and raising five children. My husband Ed

had done graduate studies in Anabaptist theology, reformers and communal life. When we came to the Mennonite church, Ed was already a pastor and missionary. Our family attended Parkview Mennonite Church in Kokomo, Ind., for three years. At the beginning of the 1980s Ed received a call to Sugar Creek Mennonite Church in Wayland, Iowa. I was then in mid-life transition and discovering a deeper identity within myself as I sought to adjust to the new role of "pastor's wife."

In time I became aware of the silence of women in the Mennonite church and a lack of personal identity that they demonstrated by introducing themselves using their husbands' names and not speaking again for the rest of the evening. Along with that I felt uncomfortable with the expectations that came with being a pastor's wife. I decided not to allow the traditional role of a pastor's wife to define me. I wanted to move into my role by faithful listening to the Spirit of Christ within me and among the gathered community.

This decision meant owning my particular gifts rather than trying to live out the gifts of other pastor's wives. For example, instead of serving large dinner groups with many dishes, I served small groups with soup, salad and homemade bread at lunchtime. In making this choice I wanted women to glimpse what it means to be true to the person that God created us to be. I hoped to show that we are each distinct, having different gifts. By recognizing that we are meant to live more creatively and faithfully in the family of God, we become the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In our community, it was customary for wives of pastors to accompany them to visitations to the hospital. The question was raised, "Why doesn't Wendy go with Ed to the hospi-



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tal?" Instead I visited the elderly in retirement homes doing volunteer chaplain work on my own. I felt appreciated and called upon to minister in that way.

In the past year, during a Spiritual Life Week at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Ted Koontz spoke of the formation of the "Mennonite personality." He noted that during the years following the radical reformation of the 16th century, the fire brought about by the indwelling Spirit of the living Christ in the community had begun to dim. The lives of subsequent Anabaptists became less energized to reach outward. They gradually developed a shell of behavior that was quiet and hard-working. They became anxious about calling themselves Christians for fear their lives did not measure up to the righteousness of the kingdom of God. Their focus had moved outward, following the example of Christ, but they lacked the inner experience and relationship with Christ that was at the heart of the radical reformers.

In thinking about what Ted said, I surmise that it was the outward focus of the Mennonite church that had thrust

Dorothy on a journey away from the Mennonite church of her upbringing. I think she was searching for an experience of the living Christ within. During her journey she managed to regain what for many had been lost.

It was the other way around for me! I knew the inner experience of the living Christ, but it was through the Mennonite church that I found believers who paid serious attention to discipleship. Through the inner practice of spiritual disciplines and the outward journey of living in community, I found harmony. This inner and outer integration enables me to respond to persons and needs beyond myself, making discipleship a reality rather than a dream. First I had to be honest about my own humanity. I did not have to pretend to be perfect. Only God is good! I had to recognize my unique gifts and creatively live out my roles.

I have come to appreciate the men and women in the Mennonite church who pay attention to the presence of Jesus within, and those whose lives are fragrant, open and fresh with the love of God. Over the years these persons have become brothers and sisters and mothers to me. Their hearts have welcomed me, giving me a place to belong. Their beauty is one of a gentle and strong spirit that reminds me of Dorothy.

Now, as campus minister and part-time faculty at Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS), I am thankful for the patchwork quilt of my life story. It serves me as I serve others who are preparing for the work of ministry, and it serves me in a community incarnating life in the Spirit of Jesus. I appreciate that women and men are both attentively heard and respected at EMS.

While old patterns of relating still tend to shape our life together in constrictive ways, we are learning to cut new cloth together to give ourselves more room. These new



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shapes we are creating mean first owning our particular human shape, for we are all "clay jars" that crack easily without the extraordinary power of God that incites us to confession and forgiveness (II Cor. 4:7).

While discovering our new shapes can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit, that transformation into the image of Jesus incarnates God's love among us. Part of my task then is to pay attention to God's presence among us in the Spirit of Christ, bringing Jesus' love into all areas of my life and work. This involves holding fast to what is good and letting go of that which keeps a false distinction between me and others. Through this I hope to invite others to the high adventure of being loved by God and living out that love.

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by Miriam Ruiz

A new breed of Mennonite women

As I turn back the calendar eight years, I am reminded of my first contact with the Mennonite faith, and I am glad to stop and reflect on it. Soon questions begin to form which I need to answer: Was my decision to become Mennonite good? How has this road been? Has it altered my lifestyle and does my current lifestyle follow Anabaptist teaching? In what ways have my spiritual needs been met? Taking a break from my busy schedule to think about these questions has taken me on a fascinating journey.

I must begin by saying that coming to a new country and adapting to a new lifestyle and a new language is enough of a challenge all by itself. It is an extremely difficult and never-ending process. Yet with the perspective I have gained in the last eight years, I see these challenges as contributing to my character development.

Coming from a developing Latin American country with my Italian/Spanish background and traditional Catholic religion, I had to break with much of my heritage to become a Mennonite. This decision meant I left my family tradition. Even today discussing religion with my family is taboo.

The Catholic church of my homeland is vertical in its organizational structure. There is a hierarchy of authority with no room for faith questions and no space for personal interpretation. This rigidity is also reflected in a family life where women are not permitted to have an opinion nor a position of leadership. Although the rest of my family had traditional role assignments, because I am the youngest of 10 children, I was privileged. My position gave me freedom to express myself and to take initiatives that were not granted to the others.

On my 15th birthday I exercised that freedom theologically by declaring myself an atheist! By then I had rejected all kinds of Catholic beliefs and become a fervent defender of different philosophical and political positions. For several years I read Kant, Marx, Lenin, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and included the classics of Socrates and Aristotle. Later my

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curiosity bent toward exploring the beliefs of different religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Gnosis, Yogism, etc. Through all of these I did not find answers to my basic questions. This fruitless search for meaning caused me to fall into skepticism. For a long time I argued that all religion was invented by human beings to help them cope with the stressful situations of life. I could not have imagined my life would be changed as it has. God certainly has mysterious ways!

Later, with a husband and three children, I left my homeland and applied for Canadian refugee status in Chicago, Ill. There our case was heard, and we were informed that we needed a Canadian sponsor. When we were notified that a Mennonite church in Clearbrook, B.C., had agreed to be our sponsor, we looked in library books for information about who the Mennonites were. The books confirmed that Mennonites were fundamentalist, conservative believers with rigid structures. To us this sounded much like groups we had known in Latin American countries, but we were in for a surprise.

Our first Sunday in the Mennonite church was unforgettable. Our family began by breaking many stereotypes of immigrants from developing countries, but the Mennonite community was different than any of our expected stereotypes too. It was a pleasant experience for us to find a group that experienced such joy simply by helping other human beings. Rather than faith expressed only in their prayers and readings, we began to see their faith at work. That broke through my skepticism and opened the way for renewed religious curiosity. I believe God was working through the way I was introduced to these Mennonites.

On our first meeting with Pastor Dave Ortis, he extended his hand to welcome us and immediately gave us information on the Catholic priest in town. Since we were Hispanic, he assumed we were Catholics and wanted us to know we were free to attend the Catholic church. I could hardly believe that there were no conditions for us to be accepted, no strings to Mennonite sponsorship. God used this moment to turn me around 180 degrees. My husband and I looked at each other and decided that we were going to stay with this church. We wanted to know what theological perspective allowed this group to help us without asking us for anything in exchange!



A sense of community and a strong respect for human life, without judgement or condition, were the first characteristics of the Mennonites that I appreciated. For me, solidarity, peace and social consciousness are the most valuable characteristics of the Mennonite church. Within our Mennonite community I had the opportunity to witness words transformed into actions. There was clearly an orientation toward liberating the oppressed and helping the weak and disabled.

Where these attitudes existed in the repressive governments of military authority in which we had lived, they were classified as leftist, and the proponents of justice, equality and peace were always violently eliminated. I first wondered if these Mennonites were a radical and subversive group and whether it was dangerous to belong to them.

As a non-ethnic Mennonite from a non-democratic country I viewed groups with the following characteristics as notorious: 1) Groups that are politically disengaged. In our developing country, government and religious leaders either walked together or were enemies. They were never neutral. Such alliance or enmity always effected the church's theological position. 2) Groups with a social orientation. In a colonial government structure, the religious orientation of the leaders is defined through its favoritism or antagonism

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toward the government. When religious groups with social agenda stand for peace, justice and equality, governments consider them subversive and threatening to stability and civilian order.

It took us several months to understand the democratic system of government and the role the Mennonite church played within that system. Understanding the Anabaptist tradition required some re-learning. I had to adjust from a political perspective to a biblical one. I now know that every human deserves respect no matter what his or her economic standing is.

As I observed this religious group, oriented to alleviating social problems not only in the congregation, but also in the community, I became very excited. I began to picture where I could fit in this society. Then I was ready to be baptized into the Mennonite church. I joined MCC service and found a place where I could practice Jesus' teachings of love, peace and justice. This seemed to me a sign from God that I belonged here.

From my former secular perspective with my upper-middle class position, I had sought social ministries in illiteracy, family issues and medical aid. Now I am grounded in my faith and know the purpose behind my actions. I desire to be a challenger in the way that Jesus was. My satisfaction with belonging to a religious group based upon biblical teachings and not upon political issues has grown. The injustice and poverty I witnessed while living in some Latin American countries set a strong desire in me to stand for justice.

When I hold up my role as a Mennonite woman in my new society, I don't think I measure up to the traditional role. Although I have a strong desire to work for peace, justice and equality in this needy world, I do not relate to traditions of baking, quilting and playing the "Mennonite name game." I respect the beautiful traditions that have shaped Mennonite women and their families to become what they are, but I belong to a new breed of Mennonite women, anxious to practice our faith in the social field through service to a hurting world.

As one of this new breed, I do not want to lose the courage of my Latin American heritage for standing against the establishment in order to transform our communities. Women in developing countries are empowered to oppose injustice out of the great need in their little villages. In such villages there is no education and becoming a leader is not an opportunity, it is an obligation.

Maybe those of us who have lived in oppressive environments value freedom, peace and justice in a concrete way that others cannot. I think my experience helps me to better appreciate what I have now and also helps me to stand up for others who need my leadership.

My belief that wealth disempowers social action, moves me to challenge Mennonites not to rest on the fact that they have a socially-oriented theology and institutions to alleviate human suffering. We cannot relax our commitment and simply become observers in the world. We are Christ's apostles in the world today and that role requires action.

My experience as a non-ethnic Mennonite has been rewarded with many exciting experiences as well as some negative ones. When I weigh them out, I feel both have shaped my faith and my form of involvement among Mennonites. Working for MCC Women's Concerns in the last four years has been a plus for my understanding of Mennonites and a new ministry for me to serve Christ.

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"I am a Mennonite, because it is within the Mennonite church that I can follow Jesus Christ and use my gifts."

by Libby Caes

Challenged to use my gifts

After growing up in Princeton, N.J., I left home to go to college in California. It was 1970, the year Scott McKenzie sang "Flowers in Your Hair," a popular tune about the drop out, drug culture. My parents must have worried that their straight, no-nonsense daughter would be corrupted by California culture. Instead I became a Christian. The highlights of my college years were growing in my faith, discovering my gifts and participating in the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter on campus. Unfortunately my parents could not understand or affirm the radical reorientation of my life. Their disapproval continued for many years.

After college I moved to Boston. Four years later I moved to Chicago, which became my home for eight years. Wherever I lived I was always an active member of a local congregation, but I did not find a theological home until I relocated to Philadelphia with my husband David.

Unbeknownst to us, West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship (WPMF) began meeting for worship a week after we moved to Philadelphia. The group that we joined was a small group of people trying to figure out how to "do church" together. Some of the weekly evening gatherings were downright depressing. Seldom could Dave and I sit through a whole service because our baby daughter could be rather temperamental. I was often quite tired at the end of the day and the meeting space wasn't visually attractive. At times it was easy to ask, "Why bother?" But that first year in Philadelphia was lonely and apart

from a few friends at work, WPMF was the only place where we were able to make friends and find support.

In the spring of 1986 I was called as WPMF's second elder. Like many people at WPMF, Dave and I expected to be in Philadelphia for only a few years. My husband was getting a master's degree and we planned to leave the area when he was done. We thought we were only passing through.

When I joined WPMF I didn't know that there were the GCs and the MCs. What conference were we in? That was irrelevant! As my call to pastoral ministry grew and was confirmed, I also grew in my relationship to Franconia Conference and the Mennonite church. Except for one nine-month break, I have been part of the leadership team since 1986.

In 1993 I was licensed by Franconia Conference for pastoral ministry. First I worked with Dave Greiser as associate pastor. After Dave left to pursue a Ph.D., I was solo pastor for a year. Now I share pastoral responsibilities with J. Fred



"Those of us who have made the Mennonite church our adopted home do not have the status of a last name or a shared history. Like Ruth, we are foreigners. We come because we have gotten to know you and want to worship and serve the same God"

Kauffman. We had been elders together in 1987. Both of WPMFs current pastors have been called from within the congregation.

Becoming a pastor was never my goal. Both in the 1970s and 1980s I had met women angry about their experience in the Christian church. If anything, they drove me away from seeking leadership. I did not want to become angry like them. Because I never had a positive role model of women in pastoral ministry, I did not seek this role for myself.

I have also met angry women in the Mennonite church. The anger has a variety of sources—the upbringing in conservative Mennonite homes, the second class status given to women. Because I did not grow up in a conservative Mennonite culture, this anger is not part of my experience. My experience does include a Swiss-German father, but he would have nothing to do with the church.

It was three men, three Daves, in the congregation who encouraged me and challenged me most to use my gifts. When I was consumed with caring for toddlers, Dave Greiser would ask when I planned on going to seminary. Occasionally we would discuss my present and future role in the church. Dave Medema insisted that I enroll in a preaching class and a seminary reflection group with him. I did and then I was hooked! And my husband, Dave, gave me the security, the affirmation and the permission I needed to do it all. Over time my calling has emerged and has been affirmed by others. It is one I have embraced with joy.

I am a Mennonite, because it is within the Mennonite church that I can follow Jesus Christ and use my gifts. As my relationships deepen in the larger church, I feel less like an outsider. Does it matter that I do not have the right last name or that I am a woman? Sometimes it does; most of the time it does not.

The Mennonite church can be a difficult place for outsiders, because the welcome mat isn't always out. The story of Ruth comes to mind. Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, discouraged Ruth from returning to Bethlehem with her. Ruth would be a foreigner with no status. Ruth chose to take on Naomi's identity and that of her people because of the relationship she had with her mother-in-law.

Those of us who have made the Mennonite church our adopted home do not have the status of a last name or a shared history. Like Ruth, we are foreigners. We come because we have gotten to know you and want to worship and serve the same God. We want to follow Jesus with you. Will you set up barriers, or will you welcome us and allow us to share the journey with you?

Libby Werenfels Caes, a graduate of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, is one of two pastors at West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship. With her husband David and daughter Amy she has lived in Philadelphia since 1985. Quilting, biking and a backyard vegetable garden are activities that bring wholeness to Libby's life.

Letters

Thank you for the September-October *Report on Women* and CPS. When I first opened the envelop and saw the headline I felt little interest. As I started to read the stories, however, my interest was piqued, my emotions engaged. The women featured came across as so real, so ordinary, yet so strong and wise in their experience. This is a piece of my\our history that I'm so very glad someone had the foresight to record and publish. I'd encourage Rachel Waltner Goossen [researcher/compiler] to write a book.

—Betsy Headrick McCrae, MCC Vietnam

I just finished reading the November-December edition on Abortion. Thank you for a wonderful issue. The abortion issue isn't a clear-cut yes/no proposition. Thank you for presenting both sides in such a thoughtful, caring way. I tend to be pro-life, but see the need for abortion to be available and used to a minimum. Recent events, such as the shooting of a doctor in Vancouver and the sentencing of a former minister in Florida show one extreme that is scary and certainly outside the law and democracy. I plan to share this issue with a couple of friends and consider this an issue which should be of much interest if it were even more widely distributed.

Have you ever done an issue on euthanasia? That could be interesting, considering how we have the technology to prolong life, but also have to deal with the moral and ethical issues of quality of life. The other side of the coin is what I saw living in rural Bolivia with MCC, where people died of stupid, unnecessary things because there was absolutely minimal health care.

—Linda Polsson, Prince Rupert, B.C.

The November-December *Report* [on abortion] was excellent. Eve included articles that covered, very well, all points of view. It is unusual for one magazine to carry pro-life and pro-choice articles and do it in such an effective way. Although the Mennonite Church's position is pro-life, there are many of us in the church who believe abortion should be a personal decision.

Anyone who has had a baby knows what a wonderful experience it is. The decision for an abortion is very traumatic and the support of family, friends and church may be more important than when the decision is to carry the pregnancy to term.

—Ruth Rittgers, Imlay City, Mich.

My pastor is a woman

Following is a poem written for the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, held summer 1994 in Winnipeg. Dueck writes, "I was about to read it when the moderator shut down the discussion."

I am a son of Menno,
an arbitrary blessing.
One chromosome difference and so
Privileged to lead, to assert, to generate.

As a male considered
not an inferior image of God
not less rational,
not the weaker vessel,
not the original sinner,
not the giver of the apple.

But cursed are Menno's daughters by his sons,
Condemned to silence, to assistance, to dependency,
Not powered to lead.

In days past lumped with slaves and Gentiles,
Persons one thankfully was not created.
The outer court was their lot.

A sign of the fall
Women give birth in pain;
A sign of the fall
Men control how they mediate life.

In the world men lord it over women
but no so among you.

Oh, children of Menno,
your center will not hold,
you spirit will die,
if woman cannot also speak the word of God.

Sons of Menno in repentance give away your power,
Hide not behind human rules divinely blessed.

If we are not just and compassionate
Our daughters will not dream dreams,
Our sons will sustain our sins.

—by Al Dueck, Fresno, Calif.

Publications

Making Friends with the Bible by Elouise Renich Fraser and Louis A. Kilgore is a new Herald Press book sharing ideas for personal and group encounter with the Bible. Dorothy Jean Weaver of Eastern Mennonite Seminary wrote the book's foreword.

A Dry Roof and a Cow: Dreams and Portraits of our Neighbours is a new coffee-table book, published on the occasion of MCC's 75th anniversary. It features black and white portraits of some 65 people in eight cultures and quotes about their dreams for their future. The book includes writings by Henri Nouwen, Katie Funk Wiebe, Christine R. Wiebe and Howard Zehr. Available through SELFHELP shops, bookstores and MCC (Akron and Winnipeg) offices.

Culture for Service: A History of Goshen College by Susan Fisher Miller offers the college's history against a backdrop of changes within the broader Mennonite church. Includes 24 pages of photos. Available from College Relations, 219-535-7000.

A Life of Wholeness: Reflections on Abundant Living by Ann Raber focuses on wellness, wholistic health and Christian faith. Published in 1994 by Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa.

Book review: What flavour is darkness?

Darkness is a marshmallow by Diane Driedger (Moonprint Press, PO Box 293, Winnipeg MB, 1994, 34 pages, \$6)

Darkness is a marshmallow is Diane Driedger's first book of poetry (though not her first book nor her first time as a published poet). It, like the poetic offerings of other women of Mennonite heritage, explores tradition, faith, fear and self expression, but does so in a voice that is entirely Diane's. She speaks through images both complicated and simple. I recognize the voice even though I do not share this Mennonite heritage. I am grateful this time not to feel a little excluded. Listen with me.

First impressions. The cover: a light blue—but not quite, a shade I cannot quite see. The graphic: a moon—half of its face hidden by the face of an upside-down sun. Perspectives change depending on which face you focus on. The title elicits contradictory images in my brain that confuse and intrigue. I know that if I turn to the back of the book this image and others in the book will be named, but I find myself reluctant to be told what flavour the marshmallow is.

Inside the poetry is gathered into three sections: "i will not be silenced," "i'm here," and "bright star."

If I did not suspect before that the poetry in this book would be full voice, image rich, and demanding attention, I knew it after reading the first section. "i will not be silenced" contains two powerful poems recalling the church tradition of shunning, its effect on individuals and families, the anger and the sorrow, the isolation. And they remind us that silence cannot last, that the voice, the story, the spirit will be heard even if it takes a generation or two to find expression in a great grandchild's poetics.

"i'm here" continues this exploration of images of faith, tradition, silence and voice using questionings and changing perceptions. Several of these poems explore the elements of religion through the eyes of a child. My stomach ties in knots as I read "at four," witnessing the anguish of a literal understanding of communion, eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus, a beloved friend. Several pages later reading "inside the drug store" my spirit flies free as I experience another image of communion—shared giggles, the breaking of a popsicle and "purple tinged tongues."

In the poems of "bright star" the voice becomes stronger, naming and re-naming, claiming and reclaiming, a celebration of existence. "...i am the peacock/fanning my tail/i am a mannequin/i am whatever/i define..."

As I finish the last poem and close the cover there is a sense of satisfaction; the images, the emotions, the flavours have not all been pleasant—darkness can be bitter—but ultimately as the previously avoided back cover states, it "becomes a marshmallow melting off [the] tongue."

Reviewed by CM Kathleen Hull, Winnipeg, Man.

News and verbs

- A “celebration of friendship” is the focus for an upcoming edition of *Women’s Concerns Report*. Compiler Kathleen Hull would like to include a collection of short (500 words or less) reflections and stories about friends and their friendships. She writes “I am looking for a mixture of experiences: friendships new and old, with family members or partners, with ‘strangers,’ friendships that cross/connect culture and race, age, religion, economics.” If you have a friendship story to share, please send to Kathleen Hull **by June 1, 1995**, at: MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9; fax 204-269-9875.
- Alonna Gautsche Sprunger has been named director of the **Congregational Resource Center** of Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Conference. She had previously served as director of Advocacy Programs with Mennonite Health Services.

- A **Springtime Gathering for Women** will be May 26–28 in London, Ont. It will include speakers, workshops, ritual and celebration. For information contact: Finders Keepers, Suite 255, 4-1030 Adelaide St. N., London, ON N5Y 2M9; phone 519-645-2529; fax 519-434-6343.
- Mariann Martin has been named director of the 1995 Mennonite church **college student summer traveling troupe**. The group is made up of students from Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College and Hesston College. Martin is on the faculty of Hesston College.
- Julia Spicher Kasdorf’s **poem, “Mennonites,”** has been included in a new literature anthology, *The Many Worlds of Literature*, edited by Stuart Hirschberg, Prentice Hall, 1994. The poem is in a section on “Family and Cultural Heritage.”
- Goshen College is seeking **faculty** candidates for a position in **accounting**. For information contact John Nyce, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen IN 46526; phone 219-535-7503; fax 219-535-7660.

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13th Women in Ministry conference

"Unity and uniqueness in Christ: Celebrating global sisterhood" is the theme of the 13th Women in Ministry Conference, to be May 26-28 at Columbia Bible College, Clearbrook B.C. Speakers will be Elizabeth Tapia of the Philippines, professor of theology at Union Theology Seminary, and Susan Classen of Ohio, former MCCer in Bolivia and El Salvador and author of *Vultures and Butterflies*. For information contact Miriam Ruiz, MCC B.C. Women's Concerns, Box 2038, Clearbrook, B.C. V2T 3T8; phone 604-850-6639/857-0011.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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Women in ministry

Rosie Epp was installed October 30 as co-pastor at Zion Church, Souderton, Pa.

Susan Eash is quarter-time youth director at First Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, Kan.

Julie Ellison is assistant pastor at Tavistock (Ont.) Mennonite Church.

Jean Lehn Epp began in August as pastor of Mississauga (Ont.) Mennonite Fellowship.

Martha and George Janzen are new pastors at First Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alta.

Anita Amstutz is half-time interim pastor at First Mennonite Church in San Francisco.

Margaret and Gary Peters were licensed June 19 as pastors of Hanley (Sask.) Mennonite Church.

Amanda Rempel is chaplain at Kidron-Bethel Retirement Center in North Newton, Kan.

Beth Hennessy of Peoria, Ill., has been named by the Kitchener (Ont.) Inter-Church Chaplaincy Committee as chaplain for families struggling with mental illness.

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